

# Site-Wide Environmental Impact Statement for Continued Operation of Sandia National Laboratories/New Mexico (DOE/EIS-0556)

## The Environmental Review Process

### What is NEPA?

The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) is our basic national charter for protection of the environment. NEPA requires that federal agencies consider the potential environmental impacts of their proposed actions before making decisions.

Two major purposes of the NEPA process are better

#### DID YOU KNOW...

**NEPA WAS THE FIRST MAJOR ENVIRONMENTAL LAW IN THE U.S. AND IS OFTEN CALLED THE "MAGNA CARTA" OF FEDERAL ENVIRONMENTAL LAWS.**

informed decisions and citizen involvement. NEPA requires the preparation of an environmental impact statement for major federal actions that may significantly affect the quality of both the physical and human environment.

Although NEPA is a procedural law that does not dictate the decision to be made by the federal agency, NEPA does require that federal agencies:

- Provide opportunities for public involvement, which may include participating in scoping, reviewing draft EISs, and attending public meetings.
- Formally assess the environmental impacts of their major federal actions and consider reasonable alternatives.

Under NEPA, the term "environment" encompasses both the physical environment (e.g., air, water, land, plants, animals) and the human environment (e.g., health and safety, transportation, jobs, and cultural resources).

### What is the NEPA process?

The major steps in the NEPA process for preparing the Site-Wide Environmental Impact Statement (SWEIS) are: issuing a Notice of Intent (NOI) to begin the SWEIS process; gathering input on the scope of the SWEIS from all interested parties, including agencies (federal, state, and local), public interest groups, tribes/pueblos, local businesses, industry, organizations, and members of the public; preparing the Draft SWEIS; issuing a Notice of Availability (NOA) for the Draft SWEIS to begin the public review period; receiving public comments on the Draft SWEIS and responding to those comments in a Final SWEIS; and issuing a Record of

Decision (ROD). The ROD will explain the agency's decision, which is based on the SWEIS and other related information (e.g., policy, technical factors, and costs).

### What is the scoping process for the SWEIS?

The National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA), a semi-autonomous agency within the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), published an NOI for the SWEIS in the *Federal Register* in April 2023 to inform the public that the SWEIS will be prepared and to formally announce the beginning of the scoping process. The NOI describes the proposed action and alternatives that the agency has taken under consideration, provides information on issues and potential impacts that would be analyzed in the SWEIS, and invites comments, questions, and suggestions (both written and verbal) on the scope of the SWEIS. The scoping comments provide guidance for NNSA in determining the alternatives, issues, and environmental impacts analyzed in the SWEIS. DOE regulations require that at least one public meeting be held to facilitate the collection of public comments. NNSA is holding two public scoping meetings for the SWEIS: one centrally located, in-person meeting (with a virtual link for listen-in only) and one virtual online meeting to reach a broader audience. In addition to these scoping meetings, the other methods for submitting comments on the SWEIS scope remain available (i.e., email or postal mail).

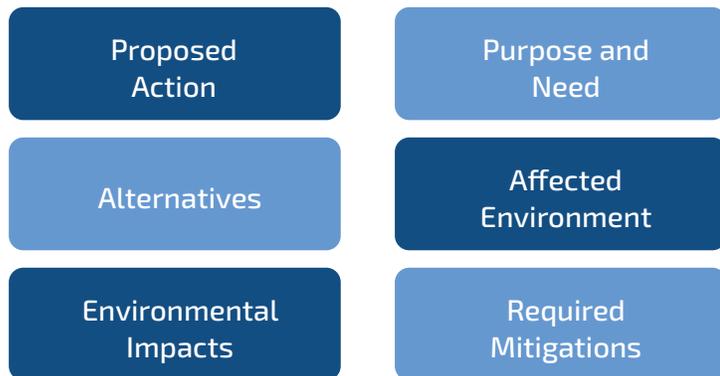
### The SWEIS Process



\*Opportunities for public involvement

## What will be included in the Draft SWEIS?

The Draft SWEIS will describe, analyze, and compare the potential environmental impacts of the alternatives that could be chosen to accomplish the NNSA purpose and need, as well as the alternative of continuing with ongoing, previously approved activities (the No Action Alternative). It will also provide information on the methodologies and assumptions used for the analysis. It will include the following major sections.



## How does the public comment on a Draft SWEIS?

Once the Draft SWEIS is completed, NNSA and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency will issue an NOA in the *Federal Register*, and NNSA will send an email notice to the project mailing list. Notices will also be posted on the Sandia National Laboratories/New Mexico website (<https://www.sandia.gov/about/environment/sweis>) and other locations. NNSA will invite public comments and participation in at least one public hearing during a 60-day comment period for all interested parties to comment on the Draft SWEIS. Other methods to submit comments on the Draft SWEIS will include U.S. mail and email. All comments received will be considered in the preparation of the Final SWEIS.

## How will the Final SWEIS be prepared?

Following the public comment period, NNSA will prepare the Final SWEIS. The Final SWEIS will reflect consideration of all comments received on the Draft SWEIS, contain NNSA's responses to those comments, and include, as appropriate, updated and revised analyses. In addition, the Final SWEIS will identify the agency's preferred alternative.

## Ways to provide comments on the proposed scope and content of the SWEIS:

- By verbally commenting at one of the two public meetings
- By submitting comment forms available at the in-person public meeting
- By email to: **SNL-SWEIS@nnsa.doe.gov**
- Or by U.S. Mail to:  
Attn: SNL/NM SWEIS Comments  
National Nuclear Security Administration  
Sandia Field Office  
PO Box 5400  
Albuquerque, New Mexico 87185



Comments are due by **June 5, 2023**.  
Late comments will be considered to the extent practicable.  
Please mark envelopes and emails as:  
SNL/NM SWEIS Comments.

NNSA will announce the availability of the Final SWEIS with another NOA in the *Federal Register*, email notices, and website postings as for the draft.

## What is the ROD?

Once the Final SWEIS is completed, NNSA will wait at least 30 days before issuing a ROD, which will be published in the *Federal Register*. The ROD will notify the public of the decision(s) made on the proposed action and the reasons for the decision(s). In addition to potential environmental impacts, the ROD will include consideration of other decision factors such as technical feasibility, agency statutory mission and national objectives, and cost. The NEPA process does not dictate that an agency select the most environmentally preferable alternative. The purpose of the NEPA process is to ensure that accurate environmental studies are performed, that there is public involvement, and that public officials, like those at NNSA, make decisions based on an understanding of environmental consequences of the proposed action and alternatives.

## For more information, see:

- [www.energy.gov/nnsa/nnsa-nepa-reading-room](http://www.energy.gov/nnsa/nnsa-nepa-reading-room)
- [www.energy.gov/nepa](http://www.energy.gov/nepa)
- [www.sandia.gov/about/environment/sweis](https://www.sandia.gov/about/environment/sweis)
- [www.nepa.gov](http://www.nepa.gov)
- [www.epa.gov/nepa](http://www.epa.gov/nepa)